An exploration of **allergic rhinitis**

Translator's preface

The following is a translation of an article written by Dr Jiang Tong of Taipei, Taiwan, which follows the article in the last issue presenting Dr Jiang's approach to the treatment of cough. In addition to frequent contributions to magazines, newsletters and professional publications on Chinese medicine, he also has written over 25 books on various aspects of Chinese medicine. His latest book is on cardiovascular disease.

This article concerns the treatment of respiratory allergies. Allergy is one of Dr Jiang's specialties. Taipei breathes the exhaust of many thousand cars and well over a million motorcycles. To make matters worse, the city lies in a basin and is surrounded by mountains. The result is a rather intense hydrocarbon soup, made worse by high humidity. The three million people of greater Taipei can kick up quite a bit of dust as well. To top it off, the Taiwanese have a real love affair with air conditioning, which means buildings, buses and public transport are intensely cold. As a result, many people have respiratory allergies, and frequent colds.

Taipei is a good place to learn a thing or two about treating respiratory issues.

Thanks to Dr Jiang for his willingness to teach me, and for his good humor and kindness. And to Steve Clavey for his editorial suggestions and encouragement.

As always, any errors or omissions are entirely mine.

Michael Max

By Dr Jiang Tong
Translated by Michael Max

Overview of contributing factors

1. 75 per cent of the cases are due to a person's body being weak, or to genetic factors.
2. Frequent colds, geographic environmental factors, air quality. (Taiwan is an island, with a damp and humid climate, especially in the northern portion.)
3. Failure to recover from the common cold, internal secretions are not balanced and even (especially for women)1
4. After a cold, if there is an excess of pathogen that has not been exhausted, this leads to excess heat residing in the Lung. There is a steaming upwards, causing the Lung luo-collaterals to be destroyed – remember that the nose is the orifice of the Lung respiratory system. A long uninterrupted time of this steaming/scorching results in nasal membranes becoming damaged, and gradually, this becomes allergic rhinitis. Of course, damage may also occur from trauma.

General symptoms and indications

The general manifestations of this disorder can be divided into acute and seasonal nasal inflammation, or two types of chronic problems: those that come and go, being at times better and other times worse, and chronic problems that are continual and without relief.

The most commonly seen symptoms include:

Nasal congestion, sneezing, constant on again, off again runny nose with thin mucus.

Itchy nasal cavity and watery eyes.

Headache, in the area of the forehead.

Due to the excessive lacrimation, the eyes are irritated by constant watering and become inflamed, resulting in the turbinates of the nasal cavity becoming swollen (especially the inferior turbinates).

Manifestations and categories

Long term chronic allergic rhinitis patients often have common cold like symptoms. In the acute phase when these symptoms manifest and the nasal secretions are investigated with a microscope, the results show the secretions often contain large numbers of leukocytes.

However if you observe the secretions from the common cold, you see they largely contain sloughed off cells and lymph. This kind of situation, when it has gone on for a long time, compromises the immunity, and as a result it is easy to pick up whatever bug

happens to be running around at the time. The seasonal allergy type of manifestation is often due to tree or flower pollen, dust and such, or unclean dust and molds from old books or periodicals. Alternatively, the sensitivity may be to other commonly contacted allergens existing in the environment.

These allergic rhinitis patients all can easily experience nosebleeds. Along with patients that have had the problem for a long time without it being cured, all easily can result in sinusitis or other more serious problems.

Common cold and sinus infection

The common cold is often referred to as damage by pathogenic wind. Bronchitis also falls into this category. Other illness symptoms, such as headache, fever, runny nose with clear fluids, can become drawn out and eventually lead to bronchial inflammation, scratchy throat and cough.

In serious cases the whole body feels achy, there is fatigue, a dislike of drafts, sneezing, sinus congestion, runny nose, and stuffy feeling in the chest that can even become painful. Often there are inflamed lymph glands, and tonsils, and other complications. Western medicine regards this as a chronic low-level bacterial infection.

Chinese medical thinking says there is an accumulation of a lingering pathogen.

Complications: If there is illness for a long time without recovery, the many tiny and fragile capillaries of the mucus membranes receive constant irritation. This can lead to nosebleeds, and in some cases even the generation of abnormal tissue, polyps, and tumor growth around the nasal cavity.[2]

Western treatment

Western medicine aims to reduce inflammation and dry up nasal secretions by the use of antihistamines, steroids, and occasionally even antibiotics. Sometimes they will wash out and cleanse the nasal cavity. In more severe cases, in which the constant irritation has led to the growth of nasal polyps, surgical methods may be used to remove them.

Surgery is quick, but only a temporary cure. Over a long period of time it is hard to avoid these growths from returning, but surgery can provide temporary relief.

In regard to allergic rhinitis, although there has been a great deal of research, they are no closer to finding the reason people have allergies. All Western medicine can really do is treat the symptoms.

Treatment principles

Chinese medicine's method's of treating allergic rhinitis are, however, completely different from Western methods. From the diagnosis point of view, there is a focus on both direct and indirect causes of illness, as well as consideration of complex contributing factors. The more layers there are to a problem, the more complicated it is. As a result, treatments can be widely different.

For example, there is a typical presentation that involves frequent sneezing and nasal congestion, susceptibility to colds and 'flu, aches and pain in the area of the supra orbital fossa that lead to headaches around the eyebrows. These symptoms are due to distention and swelling of the mucous membranes in the nose.

Most of these cases are treated with herbs to disseminate Lungs, scatter cold, regulate qi, open the nasal passages, scatter wind and reduce nasal secretions.

The formulas one can choose from, or combine, include:

Xing Su San (Apricot Seed and Perilla Powder)
Sang Ju Yin (Morus and Chrysanthemum Powder)
Cong Chi Jie Geng Tang (Scallions, Sojae Preaparatum and Platycodon Decoction)[3],

The above deal with the causative pathogen; you then choose from the following to specifically address the nasal situation.[4]

Xin Yi San (Magnolia Flower Powder)
Qing Bi Tang (Pueraria Nasal Decoction)

For patients with a serious cough, you can add *Hua Gan San* (Canopy Powder) to deal with it.

If there is nasal inflammation, either acute or chronic, then add *Jia Wei Chuan Qi Tang*[5], *Chuan Xiong Cha Tiao San* (Ligusticum and Tea Powder), or *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (Tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction). One can also increase the dosages of those herbs such as *Bai Zhi* (Radix Angelicae Dahuricae), *Fang Feng* (Radix Ledebouriella), and *Jing Jie* (Schizonepetae Herba). [6]

For sinusitis, you can use *Cang Er Zi San* (Xanthium Powder), *Qing Bi Tang* (Pueraria Nasal Decoction), or *Xin Yi San* (Magnolia Flower Powder).

For atrophic rhinitis with accumulation of crusts and pus, use the idea and method of *Xin Yi Qing Fei Tang* (Magnolia and Gypsum Decoction)[7], warm the Lung[8] and dry up nasal secretions.

One could summarise all the above with two recommendations: first dispel wind and scatter cold, while addressing auxiliary symptoms; then improve the body's overall constitution, and harmonize the immune function. In this way it is possible to slowly bring about a recovery, and to bring the body back into a natural balance.

Health practices for allergic rhinitis patients

1. Get appropriate exercise.
2. It is best to avoid cold drinks and foods, stay away from greasy fried and spicy foods.
3. By all means avoid removing clothes when sweating[9], and be sure to wear enough clothes in the first place.
4. Keep the nose clean! Advise patients not to pick their nose, and certainly not with dirty hands, which can lead to all kinds of infections.
5. Concerning food therapy, one should east a variety of foods that have anti-bacterial effects, such as onion, ginger, garlic and leeks. These foods not only have anti-bacterial effects, but are good for boosting immunity.[10]
6. Keep the workplace and environment comfortable and clean. Avoid high levels of humidity, and exposure to allergens.

More importantly pay attention to staying warm to prevent picking up infections.

Especially pay attention to prevention at the change of the seasons. These are particularly vulnerable times and require extra attention to prevent colds.

Formulas mentioned in this article

Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang (Tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction)

Huang Qi	15g	(Astragali Radix)
Bai Zhu	12g	(Atractylodis macrocephalae Rhizoma)
Ren Shen	10g	(Ginseng Radix)
Dang Gui	9g	(Angelicae sinensis Radix)
Chen Pi	6g	(Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium)
Gan Cao	5g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)
Sheng Ma	3g	(Cimicifugae Rhizoma)
Chai Hu	3g	(Bupleuri Radix)

Cang Er Zi San (Xanthium Powder)

Cang Er Zi	9g	(Xanthii Fructus)
Xin Yi Hua	6g	(Magnoliae Flos)
Bai Zhi	6g	(Angelicae dahuricae Radix)
Bo He	6g	(Menthae Herba; add at end)

Take powder with tea made from green tea and spring onions.

Chuan Xiong Cha Diao San (Chuanxiong Powder to be Taken with Green Tea)

Bo He	24g	(Menthae Herba)
Chuan Xiong	12g	(Chuanxiong Rhizoma)
Bai Zhi	6g	(Angelicae dahuricae Radix)
Qiang Huo	6g	(Notopterygii Rhizoma seu Radix)
Xi Xin	3g	(Asari cum Radice Herba)
Jing Jie	12g	(Schizonepetae Herba)
Fang Feng	5g	(Saposhnikoviae Radix)
Gan Cao	5g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)
Green tea	5g	

Boil only 10 minutes.

Cong Chi Jie Geng Tang (Scallions, Sojae Preaparatum and Platycodon Decoction)

Cong Bai	4 bits	(Allii Fistulosi Herba)
Jie Geng	4.5g	(Platycodi Radix)
Jiao Shan Zhi	9g	(Gardeniae Fructus dry-fried)
Dan Dou Chi	9g	(Sojae Semen Preaparatum)
Bo He	4.5g	(Menthae Herba)
Lian Qiao	6g	(Forsythiae Fructus)
Dan Zhu Ye	9g	(Lophatheri Herba)
Gan Cao	3g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)

Source text: *Chong Ding Tong Su Shang Han Lun.*

Indications: Early stages of wind-heat or wind-warm with headache, fever, slight chills, no sweating or little sweating, cough and dry throat, restlessness and thirst, scarlet red tongue tip, thin yellow tongue coat, and floating rapid pulse.

Additions and subtractions:

For sore throat add:

Da Qing Ye	9g	(Daqingye Folium)

For stuffy chest or painful chest, remove *Gan Cao* and add:

Zhi Ke	6g	(Aurantii Fructus)
Bai Dou Kou	3g	(Amomi Cardamomi Fructus)

For cough with profuse phlegm, add:

Xing Ren	9g	(Pruni armeniacae Semen)
Ju Hong	4.5g	(Citri reticulatae exocarpium rubrum)

For nosebleeds, add:

Ce Bai Ye	12g	(Platycladi cacumen)
Bai Mao Gen	15g	(Imperatae Rhizoma; fresh if possible)

Hua Gai San (Canopy Powder)

Ma Huang	4g	(Ephedrae Herba)
Xing Ren	4g	(Armeniacae Semen amarum)
Fu Ling	4g	(Poria)
Ju Hong	4g	(Citri reticulatae Exocarpium rubrum)
Sang Bai Pi	4g	(Mori Cortex)
Zi Su Ye	4g	(Perillae Folium)
Gan Cao	2g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)

Jia Wei Chuan Qi Tang (Augmented Chuanxiong and Astragalus Decoction)

Chuan Xiong	12g	(Chuanxiong Rhizoma)
Huang Qi	15g	(Astragali Radix)

Qing Bi Tang (Pueraria Nasal Decoction)

Ge Gen	4.8g	(Puerariae Radix)
Yi Yi Ren	4.0g	(Coicis Semen)
Jie Geng	3.6g	(Platycodi Grandiflori Radix)
Xin Yi Hua	3.2g	(Magnoliae Flos)
Ma Huang	2.4g	(Ephedrae Herba)
Bai Shao	2.4g	(Paeoniae Radix alba)
Gui Zhi	2.0g	(Cinnamomi Ramulus)
Shi Gao	1.6g	(Gypsum)
Chuan Xiong	1.2g	(Chuanxiong Rhizoma)
Da Huang	1.2g	(Rhei Rhizoma)
Sheng Jiang	1.2g	(Zingiberis Rhizoma)
Gan Cao	.8g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)

Sang Ju Yin (Mulberry and Chrysanthemum Decoction)

Sang Ye	9g	(Mori albae Folium)
Ju Hua	9g	(Chrysanthemi Flos)
Xing Ren	9g	(Pruni armeniacae Semen)
Lian Qiao	9g	(Forsythiae Fructus)
Bo He	3g	(Menthae Herba)
Jie Geng	9g	(Platycodi Grandiflori Radix)
Lu Gen	12g	(Phragmitis Rhizoma)
Gan Cao	3g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)

Xin Yi Qing Fei Tang (Magnolia and Gypsum Decoction)

Xin Yi Hua	1.8g	(Magnoliae liliflorae Flos)
Huang Qin	3g	(Scutellariae Radix)
Shan Zhi Zi	3g	(Gardeniae Fructus)
Mai Dong	3g	(Ophiopogonis Tuber)
Bai He	3g	(Lilii Bulbus)
Shi Gao	3g	(Gypsum)
Zhi Mu	3g	(Anemarrhenae Radix)
Pi Pa Ye	3g	(Eriobotryae Folium)
Gan Cao	1.5g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)
Sheng Ma	0.9g	(Cimicifugae Rhizoma)

Source text: Wai Ke Zheng Zong (True Lineage of External Medicine). This formula was originally use for nasal polyps.

Xin Yi San (Magnolia Flower Powder)

Xin Yi Hua	6g	(Magnoliae Flos)
Chuan Xiong	6g	(Chuanxiong Rhizoma)
Mu Tong	6g	(Akebiae Caulis)
Xi Xin	3g	(Asari cum Radice, Herba)
Fang Feng	6g	(Saposhnikoviae Radix)
Qiang Huo	6g	(Notopterygii, Rhizoma seu Radix)
Gao Ben	6g	(Ligustici Rhizoma)
Sheng Ma	6g	(Cimicifugae Rhizoma)
Bai Zhi	6g	(Angelicae dahuricae Radix)
Gan Cao	3g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)

Xing Su San (Apricot Kernel and Perilla Leaf Powder)

Zi Su Ye	6g	(Perillae Folium)
Qian Hu	6g	(Peucedani Radix)
Xing Ren	6g	(Pruni armeniacae Semen)
Jie Geng	6g	(Platycodi Grandiflori Radix)
Zhi Ke	6g	(Aurantii Fructus)
Chen Pi	6g	(Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium)
Fu Ling	6g	(Poria)
Ban Xia	6g	(Pinelliae Rhizoma preparatum)
Sheng Jiang	6g	(Zingiberis officinalis Recens, Rhizoma)
Hong Zao	2	(Jujubae Fructus)
Gan Cao	3g	(Glycyrrhizae Radix)

Endnotes

1. What Dr Jiang is referring to here is what in the west we would call post-nasal drip, or a continually runny nose, or a bit of phlegm that always seems to be in the throat. He sees this kind of irritation and unbalance of the mucus membranes as being a major contributing factor to allergic rhinitis. It is also one that creates its own vicious cycle. Constant irritation of the mucus membranes results in a decline of the wei qi, which he calls the "kang qi" (抗 — means to resist or to fight). Because the body's ability to fend off intrusion from pathogens and other influences is compromised, there are frequent colds. There are two accompanying symptoms that he often looks for as indications that the kang qi is in decline. The first is frequent sweat that is easily generated, the other is frequent urination. For this aspect of the problem he will prescribe *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (Tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction).

2. He always looks in the nose of these kinds of patients. Usually there is a swelling and irritation of the mucus membranes.

3. Also see *Warm Diseases: A Clinical Guide*, Guohui Liu, Eastland Press, 2001, pp. 255-257 for commentary on the structure of this formula, and further alterations.

4. Yi ji (以及) can be translated as "along with" or "as well as". I am translating it as "along with", as I often see Dr Jiang mix together a number of granulated formulas to treat these kinds of problems. As a base he will use *Xing Su San* (Apricot Seed and Perilla Powder), [5] *Xin Yi San* (Magnolia Flower Powder) and *Qing Bi Tang* (Pueraria Nasal Decoction). He then modifies with other formulas that have a certain directionality, for example if there is stuffiness in the chest with wheezing he will use *Hua Gai San* (Canopy Powder). If there is a sore throat, he will add *Qing Yan Li Ge Tang* (Clear the Throat and Benefit the Diaphragm Decoction). It is not uncommon to see him use 5-7 granulated formulas mixed together, and then modified with 4-7 individual herbs. He almost always uses *Jing Jie* (Schizonepetae Herba), *Fang Feng* (Radix Ledebouriella), *Xiang Fu* (Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundi) and *Bai Zhi* (Radix Angelicae Dahuricae), as he thinks opening the Lung and dispersing the exterior are important. If there is a cough with yellow phlegm, then *Yu Xing Cao* (Herba cum Radice Houttuyniae) is usually added as well.

6. This is a two-herb formula, *Chuan Xiong* (Radix Ligustici Chuanxiong) and *Huang Qi* (Radix Astragali Membranaceus). This combination is good for cases of Qi deficiency where there is an external pathogen. It boosts the zheng qi while dispersing the exterior.

7. Dr Jiang is big on dispersing herbs and resolving the exterior. Perhaps because Taiwan is so damp he seems to quite freely use acrid and dispersing herbs (and maybe this explains Taiwanese people's love for the extremely fragrant "stinky tofu"). He says that if there is qi deficiency you still can and should resolve the exterior, but you should add some qi tonics like *Dang Shen* (Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae) or *Huang Qi* (Radix Astragali Membranaceus). As mentioned above, he will commonly add *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (Tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction), when he wants to tonify the zheng Qi, while dispersing the exterior.

8. He likes to use *Xin Yi San* (Magnolia Flower Powder) for early stages of colds, and for when there is little phlegm and no cough. For colds with coughs, or the later stages of colds or colds that have not resolved and there is still a cough and phlegm, then he likes to use *Xin Yi Qing Fei Tang* (Magnolia and Gypsum Decoction).

9. Dr Jiang rarely sees Lung heat; he is more likely to see cold as having settled into the chest, and thereby causing a constraint that gives rise to cough, poor fluid transformation, and phlegm. He generally focuses on opening the Lung and scattering cold. It is rare to see him use cooling and moistening herbs. This might have something to do with Taipei having intense cold within its damp heat. During the summer, while it is hot and damp outside, it is cold and (comparatively) dry inside, as most buildings have air conditioning that is cranked up with a vengeance. In fact, even during the winter the air conditioning is usually turned on. I have had numerous explanations from Taiwanese people as to why they do this. It includes everything from "we need the air circulation", to "it's more comfortable that way", to "if it is too hot inside, when you go outside you will get a cold". Never mind that it is often warmer outside in the winter than inside. Our modern world gives us a combination of "climates" that doctors in previous periods did not have to consider.

10. Because the protective qi is already compromised, it is very difficult to protect the body when the pores are opened by the sweating. So these kinds of patients must be especially careful when it comes to preventing attacks by external pathogens.

11. They also tend to be warming, and have a light exterior dispersing effect.

Two accompanying symptoms that he often looks for as indications that the kang qi is in decline — frequent sweat that is easily generated, and frequent urination.